

**Remarks by USAID Director, Ms. Elena Brineman  
Commission of Public Defense Celebrates Third Anniversary**

In previous years, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), has had the privilege of supporting the Dominican public justice sector. We've provided technical assistance, training and logistical support to the Judicial Attorney, Public Ministry, Commission for the Support of Reform and Modernization of Justice and to the Commission Public Defense.

In 1997, the Government of the United State through USAID signed a grant agreement for US\$10.8 millions, amended in September 2001 for another US\$14.6 millions, to allow Dominicans technical assistance, training and logistic support from the United States to establish initiatives that will contribute to the strengthening of rule of law.

The amendment signed last September engages the Dominican Government formally to create a more rigorous selection, retention and evaluation process for the Public Ministry district attorneys and the public defenders. We are very pleased to know that 100% of the public defenders have attended training and have been tested to ensure that Dominicans will enjoy a better Public Defense.

USAID's assistance includes: strategic planning to the Commissioner for the creation of a national system of public defense and training to the district public attorneys, negotiators and community conciliators. Likewise, this program undertakes the technical assistance so the Judicial Attorney can evaluate the requirements to make a reform of the Free Legal Assistance Program of the Supreme Court.

This program includes defense and legal assistance to low income victims. We congratulate President Mejía and the Commission's Coordinator, Enrique García, for decree 904-01 signed by the President on August 31, 2001, that officially created the "National Office of Public Defense."

This measure prepares the road to expand a national public defenders system, hard with working, professionals, ethical and capable enough to provide effective protection of human rights.

I am here today to reaffirm the continuation of USAID's support to the Dominican Republic's initiatives to broaden the access to justice and our good disposition to help the institutionalism of the National Public Defense system.

Hopefully, we will keep supporting the expansion of what someday will be a real public defense system, one that will not leave anyone without a fair trial.

We share a Dominican dream to have a public defenders system, that will ensure that families will not be separated or left in poverty because one of the members was be in jail

for years without been processed... simply because they had no money to pay for a lawyer.

Finally, thanks to the national initiatives of public defense, a free assistance program and reform of the Supreme Court, Dominicans will be more optimistic about their future.

We are glad and honored in supporting your efforts.

Thank you.